

## **Translation and/or translator skills as organising principles for curriculum development practice**

**Elisa Calvo, Universidad Pablo de Olavide, Seville, Spain**

### **ABSTRACT**

Since the 1970s, Translation Studies have embraced skills and competences for the mapping of translation as a complex and specialised type of knowledge. A number of authors within TS have already extensively reviewed and analysed most of the existing translation and/or translator competence models, i.e., competence models literature reviews by Campbell (1998); Schäffner (2000); Kelly (2002); Pym (2003a); Colina (2003); Kearns (2006) and Morón (2009). The existing plethora of definitions and competence models can make the concept difficult to pin down, particularly when trying to apply translators' and/or translation skills formulae to specific contexts and operational needs.

One of the most apparent applications of some of the given competence models is as valid frameworks, the aim of which is to shape curriculum proposals in higher education—both to train professional translators or to apply translation skills to other more transferable training proposals. The purpose of this paper is not so much to shed light on the different competence models in place—curriculum products, curriculum designs—, but rather to focus on the means to ideally apply a given translation and/or translator competence model to higher education curricula. This paper follows an interdisciplinary approach where Curriculum Theory and Practice serve as filters for understanding how different translation and/or translator competence schemes can best respond to training contexts and needs.

### **KEYWORDS**

Skills, competence, curriculum theories, curriculum development, translator training, employability, transferability.

## **1. Introduction**

As Tymoczko (2005: 1082) explains, 'translation' is best considered a cluster concept with an open definition, and it is precisely this open-ended nature, together with a lack of precise boundaries, that has allowed the concept to adapt to diverse cultural conditions, social functions and evolving technologies (*ibid.*: 1088). The complexity and mutability of translation as a concept has been widely noted in Translation Studies literature over the past few decades, as Mayoral (2001) and other authors point out:

[A translation is] that which is regarded as a translation by a certain cultural community at a certain time. (Toury 1995: 32).

Translation can be seen as a kind of ecosystem moving through time, modifying itself under the pressure of influences emanating from its socio-cultural environment, and evolving successfully from one into another. (Shreve 2000: 217).

If this is the nature of translation as a concept, one cannot expect the definition and mapping of translation as a specific type of knowledge to prove any easier. Translation theorists have been discussing translation and/or translator competence for the past forty-odd years (see for example the extensive review on TS competence debates by Morón 2009). From the early, purely linguistic definitions such as that of Wilss (1976), through the cognitive and constructivist representations of the 1980s and 1990s—which focused in abstract mind-mapping models first, and competence acquisition (e.g., PACTE, 2005) and social learning strategies later—, to the more vocationally or professionally-focused definitions describing what the professional translator does, translation and/or translator competence models have multiplied and become more and more sophisticated with critical advances in technology and the translation industry.

With this in mind, the tracking down of the totality of existing theories and models in the field on translation/translator competence can easily turn into an overwhelming process, insofar as so many studies attempt to approach translation and/or translator competence from different perspectives and for any number of specific applications. Only a few studies currently exist that aim to review and classify the existing different translation competence models in TS literature (see, for instance, competence reviews by Schäffner (2000); Kelly (2002); Pym (2003a); Colina (2003); Kearns (2006); Montalt *et al.* (2008) and Morón (2009).

Understanding the original perspective adopted by each competence model can help analyse its usability within curriculum contexts. In order to facilitate the cataloguing of the different existing models in the literature, a number of criteria have often been applied (see reviews already cited), including:

- where the theoretical competence model comes from: e.g., cognitive or socioconstructivist backgrounds or other possible paradigms
- whether the model is intuitive, empirical, observational, based on surveys—how it is perceived by a specific population—, etc.
- whether the model describes the skills of an expert (or ideal expert) or those of a learner;
- whether the theoretical model is multicomponential (i.e., mind maps dissecting translation competence into different sub-elements or sub-competences) or simplified-minimalist (i.e., a more comprehensive theoretical description like Pym's model [2003a]);
- whether the model has been designed as a universal, all-purpose theory or as a more narrowly-focused model.

In principle, some of the existing approaches were designed only as theoretical products and descriptions and were later found applicable in a variety of contexts, while others originally aimed at tackling specific

situations with no intention of achieving universal, theoretical validity. Both ways, there is nothing wrong with the application and recycling of existing models to address a new situation or field, as long as former appropriate contextualisation is carried out.

There is no doubt that these varied definitions have greatly advanced the understanding of the discipline.<sup>1</sup> Translation Studies would not have been able to evolve without these previous, thorough analyses and descriptions of translation as a type of knowledge and practice. Translation and/or translator competence has become a key concept in the field.

When comparing and contrasting the existing definitions, all seem to concur on the basics while strongly differing on the details. The approaches range from abstract and purely theoretical definitions or empirical approaches purporting to achieve universal validity to *ad-hoc* applied solutions. Some open questions which can be addressed in the future are:

- 1) The lack of consensus on whether translator and translation competence refer to the same notion - both concepts are frequently used interchangeably without further distinction
- 2) The possible intertwining between translation and interpreting (TI) skills—or translator and interpreter skills.
- 3) An appropriate classification of competence paradigms and proposals.

The purpose of this paper is neither to analyse the quality or validity of the different competence models in place, nor to choose one as best for a specific curriculum or curricula in general. The present paper focuses on how skills may be applied as general organising principles for translation curricula. Competence-based curriculum design and development perspectives in the context of this paper are not to be confused with related pedagogical approaches such as Competence-based training.<sup>2</sup>

There are many real problems and situations that can be addressed from a skills-based perspective (Morón 2009): human resources engineering tasks; curriculum and syllabus design and development; curriculum harmonisation processes (e.g., within the European Higher Education Area and the Bologna process); qualification framework establishment and standardisation, etc. However, where one intends to adopt and implement an operative model to address specific real situations, for instance, the choice of the specific model needed, the justification for the selection of that specific model over another, the explanation of how the model is effective and applicable in practice, as well as a number of other undertakings, all might turn out to be quite difficult.

Translation competence as an object of theoretical study has already been widely used to inform curriculum processes in the field. This trend has also

been reinforced by the fact that skills have received enthusiastic support from some contemporary educational reforms in many countries. However, two factors exist which frequently exert a negative influence over the way skills are applied to translation curricula:

- (1) the fact that training design and development is often approached without sufficiently deep, prior study of curriculum theories and rationale (as described by Kelly (2005); Sawyer (2004); Kearns (2006) and Calvo (2009), among others);
- (2) the degree of operational effectiveness of a given skills model within a given curriculum setting.

Indeed, the deficient understanding of curriculum processes and the random application of translation skills maps may result in training programmes that, for as well-presented and rhetorically convincing as they may seem, can nevertheless be ineffective in a given context and for a specific purpose.

In the following sections of the present critical analysis study, basic elements of curriculum theories are discussed from an interdisciplinary point of view. The notion of translation and/or translator competence is reviewed from a general, critical perspective in order to clarify its value as curriculum principle.

## **2. What should be known about curriculum?**

While an increasing number of works are beginning to appear in the field of Translation and Interpreting Studies regarding curriculum issues, authors of the vast majority of this recent output seem to make little effort to ground their studies in state-of-the-art curriculum research (as cited by Sawyer (2004); Kelly (2005); Kearns (2006) and Calvo (2009). Despite this, a limited number of translation and interpreting theorists—e.g., Sawyer (2004) in the field of interpreting, and Kelly (2005) and Kearns (2006) in the field of translation—have taken account of the importance of scaffolding training plans and implementation of solid curriculum design and development theories:

It is again somewhat surprising that the recent growth in literature on translator training has tended to by-pass the issue of curriculum development. (Kearns 2006: 103).

Published literature that relates curriculum theory to interpreter education is sparse. Much of the literature on interpretation pedagogy discusses isolated aspects of interpreter training from the instructor's personal viewpoint, e.g., how note-taking skills in consecutive should be taught, how diagnostic testing should be conducted, or how to structure an introductory course in simultaneous interpretation. Individual events of instruction are in the limelight. Rarely is an attempt made to integrate educational theory on the programme level. [...] The lack of comprehensive discussion of curriculum issues grounded in educational theory is surprising. (Sawyer 2004: 26).

Traditionally, training programmes have been designed according to what is known as 'rational planning' or 'theory-based planning' methods.<sup>3</sup>

A rational, theory-based curriculum planning process can of course include practical knowledge contents in the form of skills, competences, or task performance outcomes, for example. On the other hand, the way a specific training programme is developed in practice and how it responds to its situational needs and stakeholders, regardless of the nature of the selected type of learning content, is what really determines whether it better matches a practice-based or a theory-based curriculum paradigm.

The main objection to the rational curriculum tradition is that training programmes tend not to be very flexible over time and, therefore, have a limited capacity to adapt to possible changes in the training context. As an abstract plan, a curriculum often neglects essential practical questions such as those related to human factors, including: (1) What roles will instructors and students play in bringing a specific programme of studies to life? (2) Will these roles always be the same or will they be group-dependant? Year-dependant? (3) How does a specific programme react and adapt to changes in context and to the different agents than may be involved in each new application? (4) Will the programme be equally effective under different circumstances or settings?

Theory-based curricula are often focused on attaining durability, homogeneity and standardisation (i.e., the same programme is applied in different settings including different groups of students, different schools or even different countries), measurability (for formal quality and efficiency assessment purposes) and manageability (for organisational and financial purposes). Special emphasis is made on appropriate wording and other formal issues affecting the quality of the final product or design, while practical implementation may be ignored. For example, when revising some new skills-led curricula that have been adapted to the European Higher Education reform in the Spanish context in the past three years, one major dysfunction detected is the large number of objectives worded in terms of skills which have been written for each course: in many cases, such learning expectations are far from realistic if we take into account course length, student learning background and scope. The appropriate wording becomes superfluous if the overall proposal results inapplicable in practice. Other issues such as learning sequencing and skills integration are frequently not contemplated (Calvo 2009).

In theory-based curricula, programmes function as a 'menu for learning,' taking the form of an organised body of subject matters or modules. These subject matters or modules are then further broken down into a set of hierarchical objectives which, in certain cases, are sequenced in successive steps from small, specific objectives up to large, terminal objectives (Jonnaert *et al.* 2006: 6). Given that the curriculum appears in

the form of a list of subjects and modules to be learnt, links between the different curricular elements are usually not particularly well defined (lack of integration), leading one to easily lose the overall picture of the course. Indeed, knowledge fragmentation and dissociation is common, leaving little room for real interdisciplinary, integrated, comprehensive curriculum approaches.

Furthermore, due to this insufficient contextualisation and deliberative background, identifying the groundwork underlying certain content selection and curriculum decision-making can, at times, prove to be a complicated venture (Calvo 2009).

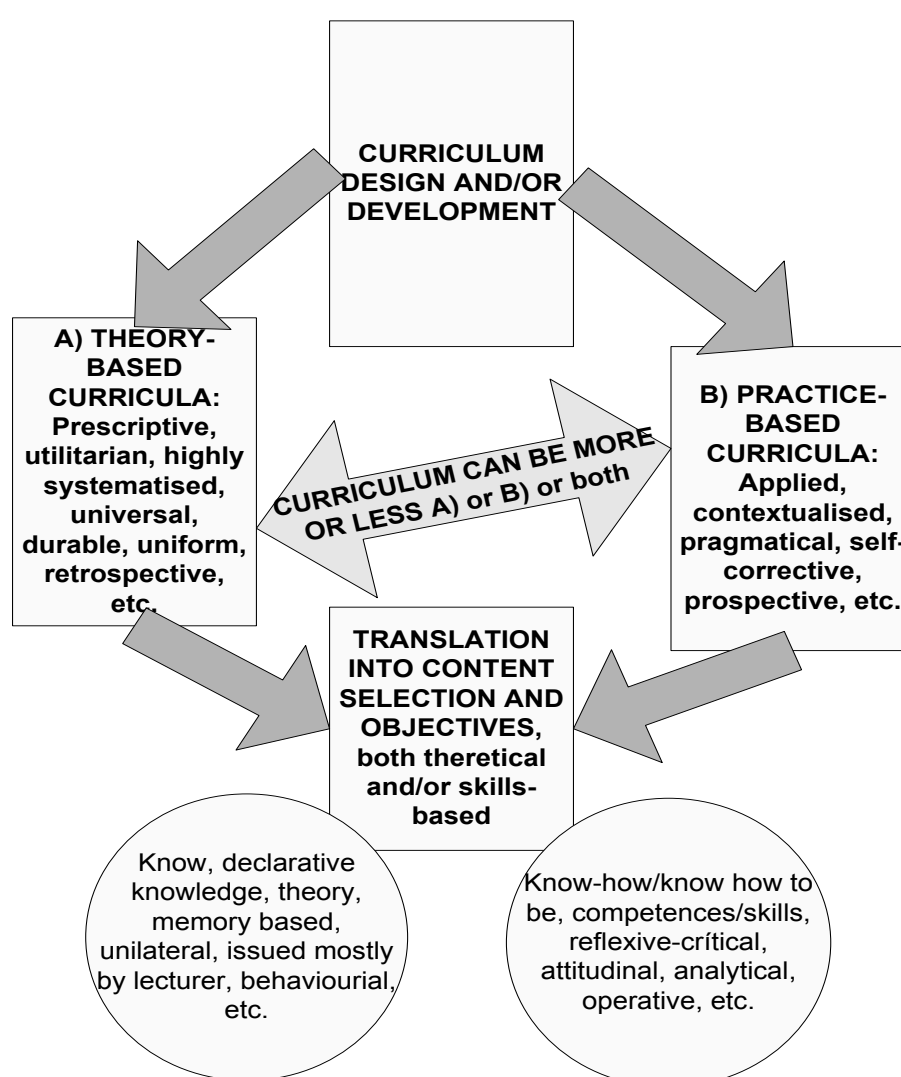
The rapid shifts in today's information society have led to the questioning of the efficiency of such theory-based training programmes. As already explained, the lack of curricular integration or skills transferability (a serious knowledge fragmentation problem), the questionably random and, at times, highly individualistic decisions regarding the contents to be taught and the criteria by which such contents are to be sequenced (if any such criteria exist), the predominance of theory over practice in the curricular content, and the low impact and significance of curricula on real learning are just some of the complaints one frequently encounters in diverse product-led<sup>4</sup> educational settings and cultures.

The past few years, however, have seen a wave of new educational reforms aiming to adapt curricula to better respond to the demands of contemporary society. According to Jonnaert *et al.* (2006: 7), three main factors have shaped these new approaches to curriculum development: (1) the emergence and influence of the knowledge society with its new methods to access information through the interaction with new types of artificial intelligence artefacts (e.g., computers, the internet, and new cognitive activities and processes resulting from the use of these new technologies); (2) new socially and market-driven forces which are no longer focused on micro-tasks and *superspecialisation*, but rather on knowledge transferability and integration; and (3) the unordered nature of the digital revolution and the fact that the greater availability of information does not necessarily imply equal information processing and accessing skills.

In view of these societal changes, newer curriculum paradigms have been defined in terms of—adaptable and context-reactive—curriculum practice, where curriculum development has been given priority over curriculum design. A curriculum is then considered as a permanent process in practice, not only an abstract product or programme on the paper. Training courses tend to appear more integrated and comprehensive and the resulting programme of studies is not as much prescriptive as orientative: the curriculum development cycle is self-corrective. Teachers are expected to have sound training in teaching and learning strategies and to demonstrate interest in improving their practices, while students

are expected to play an active role in the learning process. Curriculum practice and implementation does not focus directly on covering the syllabus or course content, but rather on achieving actual, durable, transferable and significant learning on the students' part (Calvo, 2009).

In order to better respond to student needs, the recent educational reforms invite the use of a more practice-oriented and flexible lens when examining and designing curricula. Along these lines, one of the main aims to be achieved is the acquisition of competences and skills representing transferable and significant knowledge with respect to social needs and real-world applications. However, practice-based curriculum development again is not to be confused with skills-based content selection.



**Figure 1: Curriculum as product (theory) and curriculum as process (practice) (Calvo 2009: 69)**

In order to better respond to the structure and functioning of society (as well as markets), current reforms invite and even prescribe a shift from traditional, academic training proposals towards skills-based proposals.

However, practice can be included as a learning goal on paper, while actual student learning must adapt to the given programme instead of the other way around (lack of appropriate alignment) (Biggs 2005: 132; Kelly 2005).

In a report for the International Bureau for Education and UNESCO, Jonnaert and a team of researchers (2006: 13) remarked that educational policymakers sometimes expect programme designers to develop training programmes according to new, epistemological frames of reference, e.g.: competences as opposed to traditional objectives, socioconstructivism as opposed to behaviourism, emphasis on the learner as opposed to the teacher or the disciplinary content, and employability-focused training as opposed to purely academic approaches.

Jonnaert *et al.* (*ibid.*) concluded that those working on the development of new curricula are frequently faced with the challenge of building new skills-based structures and plans with nothing but outdated tools at their disposal, and, it may be added here, in many cases without the appropriate investment in resources and necessary training (e.g., skills-based strategies require small groups of students and the employment of specific teaching and learning strategies which, of course, must be learnt before they can be utilised). After all, there is no point in including skills as curricular objectives if the curriculum or those who implement it do not contemplate how these objectives can be acquired in a significant way: "With no guidance available, they [i.e., programme writers] are expected to develop programmes and simultaneously experiment with methods for developing them" (*ibid.*).

In the doctoral dissertation (2009) of the author of the present article, the same conclusion was drawn in the context of TI. Indeed, it was noted that the field had embraced the importance of competences long before their prescription by recent educational reforms (e.g., Bologna reforms) with two different aims: 1) improving the quality of TI teaching and learning, and 2) understanding translation and interpreting processes.

As discussed in the introduction of the present paper, the need to define and understand Translation Studies as a discipline had led to major efforts to map what translation is, what translating is about, and what types of knowledge are required in the translation process. This included extensive research on translation and translator—as well as interpreter and interpreting—competence (see the reviews and models mentioned above for some examples).

When global educational trends or policymakers were just beginning to invite the application of a skills-based approach to curriculum design in TI, closer attention was paid to the consolidated literature on translation and/or translator competence. Given that the otherwise 'new' concepts of skills and competences in the general education reforms have enjoyed

consideration in the field of Translation Studies over the past few decades, it was correctly remarked that the field has been well ahead of the curve in this respect.

However, competence theorisation within Translation Studies has tended to have been contemplated as an end in itself, and not so frequently as an applied means to address curricular needs (Morón, 2009). The logical way to bring about changes in curriculum design and development in our field would seem to be through the reuse and reapplication of existing approaches or to create new *ad hoc* models which should obviously look back to the existing literature. The following pages of the present study, therefore, analyse the usefulness of the transposition of theoretical competence models onto curricula and the main functionalities and dysfunctions that appear in different skills-based TI curriculum proposals.

## **2. Translation competence or translator competence**

At the core of this debate is the question of whether translator competence and translation competence are the same concepts or rather refer to different knowledge types (Király, 2000; Mossop, Gambier and Gouadec in Pym, 2003b: 11-32; Kearns, 2006, 2008). In many existing works, the two labels are actually applied interchangeably without much differentiation. However, the distinction between translator competence and translation competence, when provided by the different authors, is frequently based on one of the following two arguments:

- the academic vs. vocational dichotomy (as in Gonzalez Davies 2004 and Kearns 2006; 2008);
- the vocational specialised rationale vs. the transferable approach.

As Kearns (*ibid.*) puts it, there has been considerable debate on whether translation programmes should be exclusively market-oriented or rather based on classical rationalism (theoretical knowledge; e.g., philology-based approaches) or both. Curricula composed according to this polarisation either contemplate: vocational schemes which tend to respond to descriptions of what translators should know or be able to do in order to be competent professionals in a specific industry (translator skills or competence); or academic approaches which rather focus on descriptive, more theoretical translational conceptions of language, intercultural transfer, (literary) translation analysis, linguistics, etc. Indeed, this dichotomy is also linked to the traditional TS discussion on whether translation theories should play an important role in translator training. In this, Kearns concludes that such polarised proposals are not enough to describe all possible approaches to translation competence: a type of knowledge that can be acquired at different levels of development and expertise. This leads to the second traditional discussion which focuses on the appropriate degree of specialisation for translators-to-be (Mayoral Asensio 2007). While most vocational proposals choose highly

professionalised and specialised competence models, other curriculum schemes defend a more transferable translation competence approach in line with contemporary employability-led policies. The question here is which proposal responds best to the different stakeholders' needs depending on each context.

Within Translation Studies, this possible differentiation between the different given translation skills labels (i.e., translational competence, translation competence, translator competence), according to the mentioned criteria or otherwise, is not always apparent.

In lay terms, we are confronted here with different translation competence approaches which can shape the student curriculum and learning experience in at least three ways (Chouc and Calvo 2011). Students could stereotypically: 1) become passive containers of the knowledge attained by humanity so far (purely academic model); 2) become highly qualified professionals who fit in a specific translator profile (purely vocational model); or 3) become empowered individuals who are useful for society and can apply their training in a variety of settings (beyond or even outside very specific translation industry profiles) (progressive, transferable skills-based model). In fact, the three models are not necessarily mutually exclusive and in some cases an integration of different approaches is to be found (Nord 2005; Kearns 2008: 210).

According to this, translation competence models could actually be generated after pinpointing professional translator qualifications and profiles (one or more chosen profiles from today's range of translation-based productive occupations). But it could also be the result of a more flexible approach which responds to the question of who needs or will be likely to need translation skills, apart from professional translators. Professional profiles are just one possible source of information when it comes to curriculum design and the chosen competence approach depends on the way 'translation' is conceived:

- 1) Is 'translation' to be seen and presented as a professional type of knowledge? i.e., purely vocational, highly specialised – as in the case of legal or literary translators, localisers, audiovisual translators or proofreaders, for example.
- 2) Is 'translation' to be seen and presented as a transferable type of knowledge? i.e., adaptable, multi-purposed—as in the case of intercultural mediators, foreign trade experts, international marketing professionals, global content managers, multilingual secretaries or diplomats, for example.

While the common core of skills at the different levels of translation expertise can be considered to be the same (interlinguistics, interculturality), there is a clear distance between intercultural translational performance in general and the skills needed to produce

high-quality 350-word technical translations, within an hour and with a specific translation memory, for example. Translation and interpreting skills at a transferable level have experienced a similar evolution to other well-known skills, such as electronic communication skills, language skills or computing skills. Before the development towards a globalised knowledge society, these skills were considered highly specialised on an exclusive basis, while today employers define them as essential core skills and require them for a number of profiles, both specialised and not specialised.

### **3. Using translation and/or translator competence models to inform curriculum**

As already explained, one of the most extended beliefs about how a curriculum should be designed is that the best way to produce a new curriculum is through the projection of a specific expert knowledge model onto curriculum objectives, thereby defining curricular content elements. This rather theoretical way of understanding curricula represents, in fact, a frequent *modus operandi* for curriculum design in Translation Studies (Calvo 2009) due to the strong influence from the profession. As designing strategy, there is nothing wrong about it. But without contemplating key practice-based factors, curriculum development or implementation success will not be guaranteed.

Such may be illustrated by means of an example. One may suppose a curriculum writer who likes a specific, existing translation competence model (here called the 'Z model'). The Z model used here can be supposed to be the result of, e.g., a scholarly contribution (assumed here to have been published just a few years earlier) defining 'translation' within a professional framework as the psychological process necessary to render any texts from one language to another through the use of computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools and digital information strategies. This general notion of translation/translator competence is then further divided into a series of specific sub-competences including (1) source language textual competence, (2) target language textual competence, (3) decision-making skills, (4) cultural knowledge and intercultural skills, (5) general and specific computing skills, and (6) general information handling and information skills. Originally, the general purpose of this definition—given in this way and according to this particular framework—is to better understand what employers seek in future professionals and what the former and latter understand 'translation' to currently mean.

This hypothetical 'Z-model' has been formulated and described in this way by the present paper to illustrate that such models can be the product of sound academic research, methods and analysis (e.g., using TAPs, interviews of employers, surveys answered by translators or professional associations, or other sorts of observational, empirical or reflective

techniques). In this case, for example, the model could result from consulting and surveying the employers' and professionals' opinions on what a translator should be like. The usefulness of such a model is clear as it could help one understand, for instance, the nature of translation today, market standards, qualification requirements, or the future of CAT tools.

As a result, the hypothetical curriculum writer may postulate that if the Z-model was sound and effective at the time and within the context in which it first appeared and was implemented just a few years back, it would also work for the new translation curriculum to be developed. Under this supposition, the writer formulates curricular objectives to match sub-competencies from the Z-model. The result is a complete -undergraduate or postgraduate- curriculum design that seems coherent and effectively-planned, at least on paper.

To extend the example, let it be assumed that in the medium-sized city hosting the institution in which the Z-model curriculum is to be implemented, there exist three other, similar institutions which had already implemented Z-model-inspired curricula, having drawn the same conclusions regarding the model's aptness for curricular adaptation in the field. Possible worst-case scenarios abound. One possibility is that, in just a few years time, the local market for qualified, Z-model-trained translators could become overly saturated, leaving new graduates in dire straits with regard to employment prospects.

For another possible -worst-case- scenario, let it be assumed that the instructors at the curriculum designer's institution are not familiar with CAT tools and that the level of foreign language competence among secondary school graduates applying for admission to the institution is too low to realistically expect their achievement of professional foreign language textual competence in just three undergraduate years (see Z-model sub-competences above). In addition, let it be supposed that the institution does not possess the necessary funds for new computers or computer software licences.

The potential, negative results of such incongruences between the Z-model-inspired curriculum and the realities of the institution are clear, with worst-case scenarios potentially including the low prestige or poor reputation given to the institution and the resulting insufficient student demand (i.e., students may choose to study at any of the other competing institutions in the city), with all of the associated economic and institutional problems which the latter might cause. Thus, by choosing curricular objectives—whether skills-based or not—without having previously analysed the needs and conditioning factors the institution must respond to, one is essentially putting the cart before the horse. Curriculum alignment (Biggs 2005: 132) —that is, coherence between

educational needs, projected learning outcomes, institutional resources and social needs—will never occur.

Within the field of Translation Studies, only a very few authors actually pay attention to curricular contextualisation and deliberation before proceeding to the application of competence models. Kelly's *Handbook for Translator Trainers* (2005), for instance, emphasises the importance of the reflection upon and analysis of the context in which trainers work prior to addressing curriculum design proposals. Kelly (2005: 22) identified different information sources for designing context-dependent curricula by means of transparent and explicit decision-making processes:

- Social needs
- Professional standards
- Industry's needs and views
- Institutional policy
- Institutional constraints
- Disciplinary considerations
- Student/trainee profiles.

When proceeding this way, we first design training programs from a perspective that starts with a thorough picture of the curriculum setting and then, when it comes to deciding on criteria such as disciplinary traditions or models, it moves on to choosing the actual guidelines and principles to orientate and inform the curriculum—which could possibly and successfully include a competence-based approach.

In Kearns (2006: 286), the notion of 'situational analysis' is presented as a preliminary stage to any curriculum design and development process. In order to develop appropriate curricula, a series of adaptation factors must be first identified and then analysed. Adaptation factors include any phenomena and conditions that can potentially affect curriculum practice including curricular agents (e.g., students and student profiles, instructors and instructor qualifications, curriculum engineers, etc.); legislation in place, social and economic context, university tradition (i.e., a tradition of adaptation to new advances or to innovate), disciplinary background (i.e., the idea of translation to be achieved, the proposed relationship between translation and interpreting, etc.). The more complete this analysis is the more practical implementation a specific curriculum will achieve.

If we start by picking up a competence model without appropriate contextualisation, we expect reality to adapt to our drafted plan and not the other way around. This might appear a truism but Translation literature and curricula review from different countries and contexts proves that only in very few cases an appropriate background and context adaptation study was previously carried out (Calvo 2009).

Some curriculum experts recommend looking back at the existing literature and theories in search for answers, but never in a dogmatic, one-sided way. In this vein, curriculum expert Schwab once said that curriculum had become moribund because of inveterate unexamined reliance on direct application of theories (1969). This is why in this paper one specific model is not picked up as the ideal one: a specific competence model can be suitable for one or more curriculum settings and still prove inefficient for a number of curriculum situations and needs.

Within the field of translation and interpreting, one of the most significant consequences of applying purely theoretical, dogmatic approaches of translation or interpreting competence has been the fact that not many efforts have been made to look at the fundamental relationship between translation and interpreting skills and their curriculum projection (Sawyer, 2004). For instance, there are not many, if any, theoretical competence models which attempt to integrate the two skills. Most skills-based curriculum approaches focus either on Translation or on Interpreting—a mono-disciplinary vision that has been useful for the field for a number of reasons. But in most subsequent applications, a very clear idea of Translation or Interpreting competence, or rather what a translator or interpreter should be, was the foundation stone on which the rest of the curriculum plan was informed and devised. One of the two disciplines frequently remained subsidiary to the other. In the case of Translation and Interpreting curricula in Spain, for instance, interpreting has typically played a subordinate role. This does not mean that a combined, balanced vision is always better than a more specific one; it only highlights the fact that the integrated option could be suitable in many contexts. Rather surprisingly theorists have shown little interest in studying whether a combined translation and interpreting competence description makes sense as a theoretical model, probably due to mono-disciplinary bias.

In contrast, a significant number of translation and interpreting combined curricula are to be found. In these cases, when curriculum objectives are worded in terms of skills, the competence model presentation is more a juxtaposition of two separated notions of translation and interpreting rather than an integrated scheme. In this vein, interesting aspects such as progression and interdisciplinarity are frequently missing.

#### **4. Functions and Dysfunctions in Translation Curricula**

After analysing translation and interpreting curricula in place in different contexts (undergraduate and postgraduate, different countries) and the literature on translation curriculum design and development (Calvo 2009), the author found out that some decision-making processes behind certain curriculum proposals were based on random, non-deliberative criteria such as:

- copycatting programmes which proved successful in other different institutions and contexts;
- following pedagogical trends from a formal and rhetorical but not practical perspective;
- following individualistic visions about what translation should be; responding to industry demands without contemplating other stakeholders;
- In some contexts (e.g., Spain), curricula are defined by national or regional legislation with no or very little margin for curriculum reformation, diversification or innovation.

The author also concluded that some potential side effects of working with a given competence model or any other objective-led curriculum design with no appropriate previous deliberation and contextualisation could arise:

- mono-disciplinary curriculum vision, based on very doctrinaire and impermeable ideas of translation (or interpreting) as a discipline or industry profile;
- lack of curriculum diversification, innovation and evolution: no curriculum debate or analysis, difficulty to interact with other disciplines;
- lack of curriculum alignment and inappropriate sequencing, both within undergraduate courses and between undergraduate and postgraduate courses;
- insufficient or inaccurate course information for prospect students (unlikely or biased job profile prospects, blurry picture of the overall curriculum, etc.);
- knowledge fragmentation, lack of curriculum cohesion and integration (significant learning at risk)—content repetition and overlapping;
- lack of self-correcting strategies: curriculum can easily become outdated;
- overspecialisation or insufficient specialisation, depending on the case;
- lack of balance between transferability and specialisation;
- unclear or mistaken student identity as regards their own expected qualification and skills
- endless lists of sub-competences overlapping each other, to design syllabi and subject or module contents which cannot be covered realistically within the given time and scope, etc.

On the positive side, well-founded skills-based curriculum design and development processes include: a smoother paradigm shift from a content-driven to a skills-based curriculum; a rhetoric that is clearer and more convincing for the stakeholders involved and can be better adapted to efficiency measurement strategies; a discourse and theory that has the potential to help building bridges between the academia and the workplace—or social needs in a broader sense; a growing interest in

organisational, planning and development training issues among curriculum agents; etc.

One of the most interesting recent proposals to Translation curriculum design is the European Masters in Translation (EMT), a partnership between the European Commission and higher-education institutions offering a master's level translation training scheme. As presented on its website, its goal is to establish a quality label for university translation programmes that meet agreed standards in education. University programmes that are benchmarked to these standards become members of the EMT network. The EMT ensures that a number of programmes are based on a valid, skills-oriented framework of competences drawn up with a group of prominent European experts which details the competences translators need to work successfully in today's market.

The EMT project can be praised in two curriculum fronts. The first concerns the fact that it probably represents one of the most sound and exhaustive curriculum design processes in our field so far. The expert group tasked with defining the competence framework chose a purely vocational approach based on two main profiles, i.e., translators within the European institutions and translators in today's translation industry. This vocational choice is undoubtedly appropriate for postgraduate levels. They also looked back at existing curriculum proposals, namely, the BDÜ Memorandum; the POSI project; the Thematic Network in the field of languages (with a translation and interpretation strand); the LETTRAC project; the Germersheim Declaration; the Rennes Declaration, etc. and they also reviewed a number of relevant works and publications in our field. The second positive factor is the fact that not every applicant programme or institution will be eligible to become a member of the network. The EMT curriculum is clearly a theory-based product in curriculum terms (a rational design), but only those candidates with favourable curriculum contexts will be admitted.

The project is still at a very early stage, and therefore any thorough assessment in terms of curriculum practice would be inaccurate at present. Some interesting questions for future analysis are:

- How does this rational model adapt to different contexts in practice?
- If the model is implemented in too many institutions: will it have an impact on its situational efficiency in the long run?
- Are there self-corrective strategies in place in order to adjust to new or modified adaptation factors?
- Will the chosen profiles match the future real employability opportunities for EMT graduates?
- Will all eligible institutions succeed in implementing and developing this model to the same extent, bearing in mind that their resources and backgrounds can be so different from each other, etc.?

## **5. By way of conclusion**

Many Translation and/or Interpreting curricula promote what it is called 'retrospective graduate identity,' as opposed to 'prospective graduate profiles' (Dewey 1916), a differentiation which continues to be as relevant today as it was at its original publishing. According to progressive curriculum theorist Dewey, education can be conceived either retrospectively or prospectively. That is to say, it may be treated as a process of accommodating the future to the past by replicating the existing models, i.e., the models we are familiar with at present, or as a utilisation of the past for a resource in a developing future. In this vein, transmitting a very inflexible idea of what a translator or interpreter should be or what translation and interpreting skills are can easily lead to discipline and professional typecasting. This whole debate is closely linked to a series of important concepts within our field: employability and transferability.

Employability aims at giving people access to the skills they need to gain and retain a fulfilling job or transfer to a new, better, job (Hillage and Pollard, 1998). However, employability is not only about responding to short-term market needs (a quantitative perspective based on the specialised profiles most in demand at a given time), but rather about generating competent, active social agents that are able to react to any given context (qualitative view) (Chouc and Calvo 2011: 72).

One good example of this is the way some British universities (for example, Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh) integrate liaison interpreting and basic translation skills in International Management Degrees. Having interpreting classes as part of a management and languages programme may seem irrelevant, yet the activity is built into the course in a way which successfully focuses on core skills acquisition rather than professional interpreting performance (Chouc and Calvo 2011: 77).

New transferable projections of translation skills would be interesting and innovative in curriculum terms. A more flexible perspective would help solve some of the curricular incongruities most frequently identified; specifically, the fact that TI courses do not successfully respond to either social demands or student expectations in some contexts (Kelly 2005; Way 2005; Kearns 2006; Mayoral 2007; Calvo 2009; Morón 2009).

As Kiraly (2000) and Kearns (2006) put it, translation and interpreting skills can be seen as something different to translator and interpreter skills, bearing in mind the growing technical and specific expertise that the translation and interpreting industries require. Translation and Interpreting skills at different expertise levels can be required in a number of curriculum frameworks that are not devised for the professional translation and interpreting market as such.

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### Biography

Elisa Calvo studied Translation and Interpreting in Granada (Spain) where she also earned her PhD (2009). She has worked as a professional translator for over ten years. Today, she is a member of the Avanti research group and teaches professional translation and translation technology at the Universidad Pablo de Olavide, Seville. Her fields of interest are: professional translation processes, curriculum design, translation and interpreting teaching and learning.

Contact: ecalenc@upo.es

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the key contributions on competence models are: the instructional proposal by Campbell (1998), cognitive approaches such as the ones by PACTE (e.g., 2005) or Shreve (1997; 2000), curriculum-applied proposals (Kelly, 2002, 2005) or the minimalist theoretical proposal by Pym (2003a), just to mention a few. For a more complete analysis, see, for instance, the thorough review by Morón (2009) in her doctoral dissertation, available on-line in Spanish.

<sup>2</sup> CBT (competence-based training) offers learning planning strategies for the translation classroom based on the outcomes demanded to meet industry and employment standards, while the curriculum perspectives presented here have more to do with general programme application, renovation and planning issues at an organisational and institutional level, and intend to include other perspectives beyond the purely vocational approach.

<sup>3</sup> The use of the terms 'theory' and 'practice' within curriculum discourses can be confusing. 'Theory' here does not refer to the selection of academic or abstract curriculum or syllabus content (e.g., Translation Studies, Applied Linguistics, or Translation History), but rather to the fact that the curriculum is first designed only in theory—that is, on paper—and later implemented in different practical ways and with different degrees of success.

<sup>4</sup> I.e., a final curriculum designed on a theoretical, purely rationalistic basis.